

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications -- Department of English

English, Department of

1-1906

Arnold's Sources for *Schrab and Rustum*

Louise Pound

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [Reading and Language Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications -- Department of English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Modern Language Notes, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan., 1906), pp. 15-17

ARNOLD'S SOURCES FOR *Sohrab and Rustum*.

It is generally assumed, either explicitly or by inference,¹ that Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and*

¹Cf. editions of *Sohrab and Rustum* by G. A. Watrous, p. 101, etc.; L. M. Hodgkins, p. 120; J. C. Castleman, p. 149, etc.

Rustum (1853) is based on the story as told in the abridgment of the *Shāhnāma* of Firdawsī by the Rev. J. A. Atkinson² (1832), which gives in an appendix a complete rendering of the Sohrab and Rustum episode in heroic couplets; or on Sir John Malcolm's³ *History of Persia*⁴ (1815); but no one has investigated the relative use made of the two, or the exact debt of the poet to either. The *Shāhnāma* has since been made accessible, in complete form, in the French translation of J. Mohl (1876-78) and in the German translation by Rückert (Berlin, 1890-95), and portions of it in the abridged versions of A. F. von Shack (Stuttgart, 1877), and Miss H. Zimmern (1883). Arnold might well have known Atkinson's epitome, published a good many years before he composed his poem, and the general impression seems to be that it was his principal source for the story of the poem. Many editors of *Sohrab and Rustum* make no reference at all to the *History of Persia* of Sir John Malcolm, contenting themselves with citing Atkinson's book.

To the present writer it seems that Malcolm's *History* was the chief basis for Arnold's narrative. The poet's familiarity with it is evident from the fact that it is the short sketch, from the latter, of the episode of Sohrab and Rustum that is included in the notes illustrative or explanatory of Arnold's *Poems*,⁵ in the complete edition published during his lifetime. No similar reference is made to the *Shāhnāma* or to Atkinson. But this, in itself, need not mean much. In his *Letters*, Arnold has little to say about the composition of his poem, and nothing about his sources for the story. In the absence of direct external testimony, internal testimony must be sought by those interested in the question of where Arnold found his materials.

The results given by a short comparison of the three accounts may be briefly summarized.

(1). In general, great variety, if not inconsistency, prevails in the English rendering of Persian names, whether proper names or place-

names; but in his choice of name-forms Arnold seems to follow Malcolm quite faithfully, making few departures or modifications. For example, Malcolm has Peeran-Wisa,⁶ *hyphenated* (I, 30), Zoarrah (I, 28), Ferood (I, 34), Gudurz (I, 35), Haman (I, 28), Feriburz (I, 33), Seistan (I, 34), etc. Arnold has Peran-Wisa, *hyphenated*, Zoarrah, Ferood, Gudurz, Haman, Feraburz, Seistan. Atkinson, on the other hand, has Pírán-Wisah, *unhyphenated*, Zúára, Férhad, Gúdarz, Húmán, Fraburz, Sístan, etc. Afrasiab is king of the "Tartars" with Malcolm (I, 39, etc.) and with Arnold; of the "Turanians" with Atkinson.

(2). In Arnold's poem, Sohrab proves his identity by revealing Rustum's seal pricked on his arm, whereas in the *Shāhnāma*, Atkinson's translation, he reveals an amulet (pp. 124, 139, etc.) or a golden bracelet, bound on his arm (p. 402). Most editors,⁷ referring to this passage, assume that Arnold intentionally departed from the original story, and credit the change to the poet's art; but Malcolm's words here (I, 28) are:

"The afflicted and dying youth tore open his mail, and showed his father a seal which his mother had placed on his arm when she discovered to him the secret of his birth and bade him seek his father."

It would seem that Arnold was following or interpreting this abridged or inexact passage in Malcolm's account, not deliberately modifying Atkinson's.

(3). The name of Sohrab's mother, Tamineh, is not given in Malcolm's *History*, and is not mentioned in Arnold's poem in the passages referring to her, although they afford good opportunity. In the story in the *Shāhnāma*, she is very prominent, and, had the poet relied on the account of the episode as given by Atkinson, she would be as likely to be named as Zal, Rustum's father. Arnold gives Zal's name and story, but these are given (I, 17) by Malcolm.

(4). In Arnold's poem, the opposing armies are encamped by the Oxus—readers of the poem will remember how much is made of this—and it

² The edition cited here is the reprint in the *Chandos Classics* series (1886).

³ Cf. editions of Arnold's poem by L. M. Guiney, p. 1; L. M. Hodgkins, p. 20, etc.

⁴ References in this article are to the edition of 1829.

⁵ Cf. the Macmillan edition (1883), I, 268.

⁶ Described by Malcolm as the "Nestor of the Tartars," and pictured by Arnold with many touches that recall the Homeric sage.

⁷ Watrous, p. 102; Hodgkins, p. 67; Seabury, p. 133, etc.

is here that the combat takes place. This might have been suggested by the reference to the Oxus in his sketch of the episode (I, 28) by Malcolm; in fact, this is the only scene for the episode which the latter suggests. The Oxus region stands out clearly in Malcolm's chapters as the frontier region defended by Rustum against the invading Tartars. In Atkinson's work (pp. 131-33, etc.) Sohrab is represented as in a fortress, Rustum as arriving before it; and the scene suggested is of quite different character. When the river is mentioned (p. 408), it is called the Jihún, and so throughout.

(5). A few references like that to Rustum's falcon (II, 199-203), the Bahrein diver (II, 284-9), Jemshid's pillars of black granite at Persepolis (II, 860-3), might possibly have been suggested by passages in Malcolm (II, 397; I, 540; II, 370), although it is possible also that the poet made them independently.

Perhaps it should be added that, of the two books, the *History of Persia* seems, in any case, the more attractive and clearer book for the poet's purpose. Atkinson's heroic couplets are not very good reading, and the story as given by him from Firdawsí, is relatively tedious, and complicated by the introduction of many personages and many details. Arnold's story is simple and clear cut, like Malcolm's, and there seems to be nothing in his materials that might not be based only on Malcolm's book. From the references given, it would seem that he turned to the first few chapters of Vol. I, the Appendix to this volume, and chapters XXII and XXIII (on the climate, manners, and usages of the Persians) in Vol. II.

If Arnold did make use of Atkinson's translation—an assumption that is not absolutely imperative, but which it is perhaps well to make—it was for stray touches in the handling; though here by far the strongest influences are the Homeric and the biblical. It might easily be that having found his story, incidents, allusions, and names, in Malcolm's *History*, he turned to the episode as told in fuller form in Atkinson's abridgment of Firdawsí. A number of similarities in the handling, perhaps fortuitous, perhaps otherwise, may be noticed between Arnold's poem and the verse account of Atkinson. Such are the

embassy of Gudarz, to Rustum, and the former's argument (cf. Atkinson, p. 131), the description of Sohrab, giving the "cypress tree" simile (*ib.* 132), touches in the dialogue where Sohrab and Rustum meet, or in the narrative of the combat, and so on. Most of these, however, are pointed out by various editors of the poem.

LOUISE POUND.

University of Nebraska.
